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Senate

(Legislative day of Tuesday, June 7, 2022)

The Senate met at 10 a.m., on the expiration of the recess, and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Eternal God, robed with honor and majesty, we praise You for the marvelous things You have done throughout our Nation's history. Lord, thoughts about Your mighty deeds continue to fill us with joy. You are Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending.

Lord, in these tumultuous times, we continue to trust You to compel evil forces to retreat. Surround this Nation with the shield of Your divine favor as You execute judgment from Your throne. Lord, continue to remind our lawmakers of their accountability to You.

And Lord, bless Ukraine.

We pray in the Name of our Savior. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). The Senator from Vermont.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, it is hard really to know where to start. I am

here on the Senate floor to talk about guns. In a world in chaos, we cannot forget about the chaos right here at home. Gun violence is killing our children: 19 students and two of their teachers in Uvalde 2 weeks ago; 20 children, and 7 others, in Newtown, CT—nearly 10 years ago; 12 students and a teacher at Columbine—23 years ago. In between? Las Vegas, 58 dead; the Pulse nightclub, 49 dead; Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, 17 dead—all victims of gun violence. And this is just a snapshot of the epidemic of gun violence in our country.

I look back at my 48 years here in the Senate and say, When will we say enough? We hadn't yet finished honoring and celebrating the lives of the 10 victims in Buffalo before news broke of the tragedy unfolding in Uvalde—19 children, 2 teachers, massacred in their school, where they learn and work, where they should be safe—safe to just be children.

This weekend, at least a dozen people were killed and 60 more injured in shooting incidents across the country. When is it enough?

After Sandy Hook, well over decade after Columbine shook the Nation, the conscience of the country was stirred. Now, we said, now we must look at our gun laws. Now, we must think about what simply makes sense and what does not. The Judiciary Committee acted. I was proud to lead that, but the Senate did not. There were bipartisan proposals—proposals that I believe can muster bipartisan support again today, support that acknowledges that there is a problem and acknowledges that we can and must do something about it. The problem is not the Second Amendment. The problem is the view that the Second Amendment is itself absolute.

I was in Vermont last week, and people would say to me, Of course, we pray for the victims, but we also pray that Congress will finally stand up and do something.

I am with my fellow Vermonters. I am a lifelong gun owner. I was on the target shooting team at St. Michael's College in Vermont, my alma mater—earned my letter in that. Millions of other Americans like myself, lifelong gun owners, are responsible gun owners and honor Americans' rights to own firearms and choose to own firearms to defend their families, or to hunt—but not to commit battlefield-style murders. To most Americans, firearms are valued for defensive purposes and not for murder and mayhem.

There are ways that we can use our common sense to keep our communities safe and keep guns out of the hands of people who are dangerous. Let's start with background checks. They are a quick and easy way to help accomplish that goal. There is bipartisan support to require background checks for commercial firearms sales. Now, I think we should go further, but we have to start somewhere, and commercial sales background checks are a good start; background checks would help to bring common sense back into this discussion.

How about extreme risk laws, also called "red flag" laws? We should encourage more States to enact these laws to allow loved ones or law enforcement agencies to petition a court for an order that would temporarily prevent an individual in crisis from accessing firearms. People who are in crisis and are a danger to themselves or others should not have ready access to firearms. This, again, is practical common sense.

We have seen where criminal gangs will send people into other States to make straw purchases of weapons that are then sold back to them. There is no criminal statute specifically prohibiting straw purchasing, so prosecutors have to rely on laws that prohibit making false statements in connection with the purchase of a firearm—a paperwork

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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